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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 7532
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4284
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 9768
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2487
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3684
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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

HaQaretz reported that following heavy international pressure, PA President Mahmoud Abbas agreed to the U.S. proposal to hold talks with Israel -- in the format of indirect negotiations conducted by

U.S. special envoy for Middle East Peace Senator George Mitchell. Yesterday senior Palestinian sources confirmed Sunday that Abbas has agreed in principle to the U.S. proposal for indirect talks. According to the same sources, Abbas intends to ask for a number of clarifications with the U.S. administration and will consult with Arab leaders prior to giving Washington his final response. Abbas is inclined to respond positively to the American proposal, as a refusal would shed negative light on the Palestinian position. HaQaretz reported that senior Israeli officials noted that PM Benjamin Netanyahu believes the talks will begin in late February and will result in the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the PA.

Yesterday HaQaretz reported that the U.N. is likely to refer the Goldstone Report to the International Criminal Court.

Featuring a picture of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wearing special laser glasses, all media cited Iran's announcement that it will enrich its stockpile of uranium to 20% beginning tomorrow. The Jerusalem Post and other media quoted the Prime Minister's Office as saying yesterday that PM Benjamin Netanyahu will travel to Moscow next Sunday for talks expected to focus on getting Russia to back stepped-up sanctions against Iran. Israel Radio reported that FM Avigdor Lieberman has left for Baku to convince Azeri President Ilham Aliyev to back sanctions against Iran. (A high-level Iranian delegation visited Azerbaijan last week.)

Major media reported that Syrian President Bashar Assad on Sunday vowed to stand by Lebanon's side against any Israeli "aggression," in an escalating war of words between Damascus and Jerusalem. In other news, Yediot reported that Syria has contributed \$300,000 to the residents of East Jerusalem.

Assad made the remark to the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Beri, in Damascus, according to the official Syrian news agency, Sana. On the other hand Netanyahu told the ministers at the start of Sunday's weekly cabinet meeting, that Israel had made peace "with Egypt and Jordan and we aspire to do so with Syria and the Palestinians. We can achieve this with two conditions: The first is that we hold negotiations without preconditions. We will not accept the notion that Israel makes major concessions in advance. We will not enter negotiations for which everything is decided in advance."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Deputy FM Daniel Ayalon shook the hand of Saudi Prince Turki al-Faysal during a panel of the Munich Security Conference on Saturday. Yediot was shocked by the fact that Israel only sent Ayalon to the conference, which prominent world leaders attended.

HaQaretz quoted Minister Michael Eitan (Likud) as saying at a Geneva Initiative conference in Dimona over the weekend that proponents of the Greater Land of Israel -- including the recently established Land of Israel caucus in the Knesset, hawkish Likud members, and other Knesset members -- are deceiving the public because their dream cannot be fulfilled. "You can't deceive all the time and speak about Greater Israel," Eitan said.

Yesterday media reported that the Ministerial Committee for Legislative Affairs was to discuss a bill sponsored by Knesset Member Moshe Matalon of Yisrael Beiteinu to annex the West Bank portion of Route 443. The bill, which has received the support of another 17 Knesset members, was introduced following the High Court of Justice's ruling to permit Palestinian vehicular access to the road. However, Matalon acquiesced to the PM's request to withdraw his bill from the agenda at the committee's meeting. Then again, Matalon told The Jerusalem Post that the bill would be brought back to the committee after being discussed by government leaders.

Leading media reported that yesterday the IDF arrested two foreign activists near Ramallah, citing expired visas, according to the two.

HaQaretz reported that Interior Minister Eli Yishai has banned Palestinian geographer Khalil Tufakji, a resident of Jerusalem, from traveling abroad for six months, citing unspecified security

concerns. Tufakji is an expert on Israel's settlement policy.

Maariv and The Jerusalem Post reported that hundreds of New York Times readers have demanded the removal of Ethan Bronner, the American daily's Jerusalem bureau chief, from his post because his son enlisted in the IDF. Maariv and The Jerusalem Post reported that some senior members of the New York Times backed the demand, while the Editor-in-Chief insists that Bronner must keep his position. The Jerusalem Post quoted Government Press Office Danny Seaman as saying that the issue of bias comes up only regarding Jewish reporters.

Leading media reported that the IDF weighs jailing soldiers alongside Palestinian detainees.

All media reported that on Saturday an 11-year boy lost his leg when he stepped on a landmine in the Golan. Yesterday the IDF acknowledged that there are problems with some of the fences surrounding minefields on the Golan Heights, and that in some of the areas the fences are not visible. However, IDF sources reiterated yesterday that the minefield the boy's family entered, with five members ending up injured by a mine, was fenced and had clearly visible warning signs.

The Jerusalem Post reported that after becoming stranded at Ben-Gurion Airport due to an alleged 9,000-shekel debt (around \$2250), the journey to Israel of an American couple, Jack and Suzan Baumann from Miami -- has been transformed into a nightmare: the wife had a miscarriage in the airport and the husband claims that the no-exit ban was the result of a mistaken identity.

1. Mideast:

Block Quotes:

1. The Illusion of Syria First

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/8): When Mitchell returns the mandate President Obama gave him to resume negotiations with the Palestinians, he would do well to also give back the mandate for reopening the Syrian track.... It's hard to believe that the Syrians are willing to cooperate via yet another round of negotiations at the expense of the Palestinians. Just a week ago, Syrian Minister Bouthaina Shaaban criticized Arab countries for ignoring the suffering of the residents of the Gaza Strip.... It's hard to exaggerate the contribution of peace with Syria to Israel's position in the region, especially to security in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Damascus channel must be reopened. This must be done in parallel with the Ramallah channel, not instead of it.

II. The Moment of Decision Nears

Ha'aretz editorialized (2/7): In his speech at the Herzliya Conference, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he thought negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians would be resumed in the coming weeks under American mediation. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said over the weekend that the focus of the talks would be the 1967 borders, with territory swaps.... Clinton's statement makes it clear that Netanyahu's grace period is nearing an end. Instead of senselessly courting the right, he should take a courageous stand and state clearly to his political partners that a withdrawal from the territories and the evacuation of the settlements are what is needed. Otherwise Defense Minister Ehud Barak's warning that without partition Israel will become a binational apartheid state will become a reality.

III. The Extremists Set the Tone for Hamas

Veteran journalist and television anchor Dan Margalit wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (2/7): Hamas apologized in response to the Goldstone report for the Israeli civilian casualties it caused in the years it fired Qassam rockets on the Gaza periphery communities. That was a wise response since Richard Goldstone, in

an attempt to retain a smidgen of decency in the report his commission wrote, threw in a few crumbs of criticism for the Palestinians as well.... Hamas, which retracted its nominal apology, has encumbered its demand that the siege on the Gaza Strip be eased. While there is no practical significance to Hamas's apology and its subsequent retraction, it is nevertheless indicative of the processes in place within the Hamas leadership -- mainly in Damascus -- in which the extremists appear to have gained the upper hand. This development perhaps also sheds light on the reasons for Hamas' unyielding position on Gilad Shalit's release.

IV. QWords, Words, Words

Former Ambassador to the U.S., former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former Minister of Defense Moshe Arens wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/8): QAs for a sober assessment of the Israeli-Syrian situation, by all indications the Syrians continue to be deterred from attacking Israel by their appreciation of Israel's military capability and the response they can expect to aggression on their part. Over the years they have amassed a large arsenal of ballistic missiles hoping to deter Israel from taking military action against Syria. This Syrian deterrent has been effective enough to keep Israel from calling Syria to account for its support for Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. So far.

IV. QSalam Fayyad Cannot Deliver

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/8): QWhile [Defense Minister Ehud] Barak said [at the Herzliya Conference] that regional instability made it harder to give the Palestinians everything they wanted (the PA could be overthrown by Hamas, subverted by Iran and Syria, unwilling or unable to stop cross-border attacks), Fayyad responded that once Israel left, the region would become more stable and peaceful. That's a rather questionable assertion.... [A particularly inciting] sermon delivered by the imam whom Fayyad appointed in Nablus was] meant to shape Palestinian politics and public opinion; what Fayyad says is meant to shape Israeli and Western politics and public opinion. Fayyad believes what he said but, as a figurehead, also knows that he isn't going to change the dominant Palestinian view or even try to do so. The audience applauded Fayyad because it does want peace and prefers him to all the worse alternatives, especially Hamas but also those in Fatah. Yet few have any illusions that peace is at hand or that Fayyad is going to deliver it.

12. Iran:

Block Quotes:

QAhmadinejad -- Yes and No

Columnist Boaz Bismuth, who was Israel's Ambassador to Mauritania between 2004 and 2008, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (2/8) : QLast Tuesday Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared during an interview with Iranian state television that his country was prepared to enrich uranium outside its territory in exchange for nuclear fuel -- exactly what the world powers had suggested to the International Atomic Energy Agency in October.... Is it surprising that no one treats Ahmadinejad seriously? Maybe this is because, one day earlier, the Iranian President talked about a QsurpriseQ he was preparing for the West -- and even a Qhard blowQ as part of February 11, the 31st anniversary of the Iranian revolution. Yesterday he threatened again. In fact Ahmadinejad is bidding for time and trying to tease the West as his nuclear scientists attempt to beat the clock. Within 24 hours he is able to simultaneously broadcast conciliation and enrich uranium as he pleases.

CUNNINGHAM